The BLIND MAN'S EYES

BY

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SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—Gabriel Warden, Seattle capitalist, tells his butler he is expecting a caller, to be admitted without question. He informs his wife of danger that threatens him if he pursues a course he considers the only honorable one. Warden leaves the house in his car and meets a man whom he takes into the machine. When the car returns home, Warden is found dead, murdered, and alone. The caller, a young man, has been at Warden's house, but leaves unobserved.

CHAPTER II.—Bob Connery, conductor, receives orders to hold train for a party. Five men and a girl board the train. The father of the girl, Mr. Dorne, is the person for whom the train was held. Philip D. Eaton, a young man, also boarded the train. Dorne tells his daughter and his secretary, Don Avery, to find out what they can concerning him.

CHAPTER III.—The two make Eaton's acquaintance. The train is stopped by snowdrifts.

CHAPTER IV.—Eaton receives a telegram addressed to Lawrence Hilliward, which he claims. It warns him he is being followed.

CHAPTER V

The Hand in the Aisle.

The man whose interest in the passenger in Section Three of the last sleeper was most definite and understandable and, therefore, most openly acute, was Conductor Connery. Connery had passed through the Pullman several times during the morning, had seen the hand which hung out into the aisle from between the curtains; but the only definite thought that came to him was that Dorne was a sound sleeper.

Nearly all the passengers had now breakfasted. Connery, therefore, took a seat in the diner, breakfasted leisurely and after finishing, walked back through the train. Dorne by now must be up, and might wish to see the conductor.

As Connery entered the last sleeper his gaze fell on the dial of pointers which, communicating with the push-buttons in the different berths, tell the porter which section is calling him, and he saw that while all the other arrows were pointing upward, the arrow marked "3" was pointing down. Dorne was up, then—for this was the arrow denoting his berth—or at least was awake and had recently rung his bell.

Connery looked in upon the porter, who was cleaning up the washroom.

"Section Three's getting up?" he asked.

"No, Mistah Connery—not yet," the porter answered.

"What did he ring for?" Connery looked to the dial, and the porter came out of the washroom and looked at it also.

"Fo' the lan's sake. I didn't hear no ring, Mistah Connery. It mus' have been when I was out on the platform."

"Answer it, then," Connery directed.

As the negro started to obey, Connery followed him into the open car. He could see over the negro's shoulder the hand sticking out into the aisle, and this time, at sight of it, Connery started violently. If Dorne had rung, he must have moved; a man who is awake does not let his hand hang out in the aisle. Yet the hand had not moved. The long, sensitive fingers fell in precisely the same position as before, stiffly separated a little one from another; they had not changed their position at all.

"Wait!" Connery seized the porter by the arm. "I'll answer it myself."

He dismissed the negro and waited until he had gone. He looked about and assured himself that the car, except for himself and the man lying behind the curtains of Section Three, was empty. Walking briskly as though he were carelessly passing up the aisle, he brushed hard against the hand and looked back, exclaiming an apology for his carelessness.

The hand fell back heavily, inertly, and resumed its former position and hung as white and lifeless as before. No response to the apology came from behind the curtains; the man in the berth had not roused. Connery rushed back to the curtains and touched the hand with his fingers. It was cold! He seized the hand and felt it all over; then, gasping, he parted the curtains and looked into the berth. He stared; his breath whistled out; his shoulders jerked, and he drew back, instinctively pressing his two clenched hands against his chest and the pocket which held President Jarvis' order.

The man in the berth was lying on his right side facing the aisle; the left side of his face was thus exposed; and it had been crushed in by a violent blow from some heavy weapon which, too blunt to cut the skin and bring blood, had fractured the cheekbone and bludgeoned the temple. The proof of murderous violence was so plain that the conductor, as he saw the face in the light, recoiled with staring eyes, white with horror.

He looked up and down the aisle to assure himself that no one had entered the car during his examination; then he carefully drew the curtains together again, and hurried to the forward end of the car, where he had left the porter.

"Lock the rear door of the car," he commanded. "Then come back here."

He gave the negro the keys, and himself waited to prevent anyone from entering the car at his end. Looking through the glass of the door, he saw the young man Eaton standing in the vestibule of the car next ahead. Connery hesitated; then he opened the door and beckoned Eaton to him.

"Will you go forward, please," he requested, "and see if there isn't a doctor—"

"You mean the man with red hair in my car?" Eaton inquired.

"That's the one."

Eaton started off without asking any questions. The porter, having locked the rear door of the car, returned and gave Connery back the keys. Connery still waited, until Eaton returned with the red-haired man. He let them in and locked the door behind them.

"You are a doctor?" Connery questioned the red-haired man.

"I am a surgeon; yes."

"That's what's wanted. Doctor—"

"My name is Sinclair. I am Douglas Sinclair of Chicago."

Connery nodded. "I have heard of you." He turned then to Eaton. "Do you know where the gentleman is who belongs to Mr. Dorne's party?—Avery, I believe his name is."

"He is in the observation car," Eaton answered.

"Will you go and get him? The car-door is locked. The porter will let you in and out. Something serious has happened here—to Mr. Dorne. Get Mr. Avery, if you can without alarming Mr. Dorne's daughter."

Eaton nodded understanding and followed the porter, who, taking the keys again from the conductor, let him out at the rear door of the car and reclosed the door behind him. Eaton went on into the observation car.

Without alarming Harriet Dorne, he got Avery away and out of the car.

"Is it something wrong with Mr. Dorne?" Donald Avery demanded as Eaton drew back to let Avery precede him into the open part of the car.

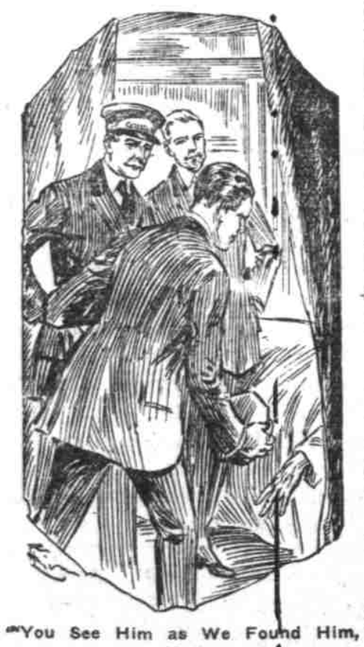
"So the conductor says."

Avery hurried forward toward the berth where Connery was standing beside the surgeon. Connery turned toward him.

"I sent for you, sir, because you are the companion of the man who had this berth."

Avery pushed past him, and leaped forward as he looked past the surgeon. "What has happened to Mr. Dorne?"

"You see him as we found him, sir."



"You See Him as We Found Him, Sir."

Connery stared down nervously beside him.

Avery leaned inside the curtains and recoiled. "He's been murdered!"

"It looks so, Mr. Avery. Yes; if he's dead, he's certainly been murdered," Connery agreed. "You can tell"—Connery avoided mention of President Jarvis' name—"tell anyone who asks you, Mr. Avery, that you saw him just as he was found."

He looked down again at the form in the berth, and Avery's gaze followed his; then, abruptly, it turned away. Avery stood clinging to the curtain, his eyes darting from one to another of the three men.

"Will you start your examination now, Doctor Sinclair?" Connery suggested.

The surgeon, before examining the man in the berth more closely, lifted the shades from the windows. Everything about the berth was in place, undisturbed; except for the mark of the savage blow on the side of the man's head, there was no evidence of anything unusual. It was self-evident that, whatever had been the motives of the attack, robbery was not one; whoever had struck had done no more than reach in and deliver his murderous blow; then he had gone on.

Sinclair made first an examination of the head; completing this, he unbuttoned the pajamas upon the chest, loosened them at the waist and prepared to make his examination of the body.

"How long has he been dead?" Connery asked.

"He is not dead yet. Life is still present," Sinclair answered guardedly. "Whether he will live or ever regain consciousness is another question."

"One you can't answer?"

"The blow, as you can see"—Sinclair touched the man's face with his deft finger-tips—"fell mostly on the cheek and temple. The cheekbone is fractured. He is in a complete state of coma; and there may be some fracture of the skull. Of course, there is some concussion of the brain."

Any inference to be drawn from this as to the seriousness of the injuries was plainly beyond Connery. "How long ago was he struck?" he asked.

"Some hours. Since midnight, certainly; and longer ago than five o'clock this morning."

"Could he have revived half an hour ago—say within the hour—enough to have pressed the button and rung the bell from his berth?"

Sinclair straightened and gazed at the conductor curiously. "No, certainly not," he replied. "That is completely impossible. Why did you ask?"

Connery avoided answer. But Avery pushed forward. "What is that? What's that?" he demanded.

"Will you go on with your examination, Doctor?" Connery urged.

"You said the bell from this berth rang recently!" Avery accused Connery.

"The pointer in the washroom, indicating a signal from this berth, was turned down a minute ago," Connery had to reply. "A few moments earlier all pointers had been set in the position indicating no call."

"That was before you found the body?"

"That was why I went to the berth—yes," Connery replied; "that was before I found the body."

"Then you mean you did not find the body," Avery charged. "Someone, passing through this car a minute or so before you, must have found him!"

Connery attended without replying.

"And evidently that man dared not report it and could not wait longer to know whether Mr.—Mr. Dorne was really dead; so he rang the bell!"

"Ought we keep Doctor Sinclair any longer from the examination, sir?" Connery now seized Avery's arm in appeal. "The first thing for us to know is whether Mr. Dorne is dying. Isn't—"

Connery checked himself; he had won his appeal. Eaton, standing quietly watchful, observed that Avery's eagerness to accuse now had been replaced by another interest which the conductor's words had recalled. Whether the man in the berth was to live or die—evidently that was momentously to affect Donald Avery one way or the other.

"Of course, by all means proceed with your examination, Doctor," Avery directed.

As Sinclair again bent over the body Avery leaned over also; Eaton gazed down, and Connery—a little paler than before and with lips tightly set.

CHAPTER VI

"Isn't This Basil Santoine?"

The surgeon, having finished loosening the pajamas, pulled open and carefully removed the jacket part, leaving the upper part of the body of the man in the berth exposed. Conductor Connery turned to Avery.

"You have no objection to my taking a list of the articles in the berth?"

Avery seemed to oppose; then, apparently, he recognized that this was an obvious part of the conductor's duty. "None at all," he replied.

Connery gathered up the clothing, the glasses, the watch and purse, and laid them on the seat across the aisle. Sitting down, then, opposite them, he examined them, and, taking everything from the pockets of the clothes, he began to catalogue them before Avery. He counted over the gold and banknotes in the purse and entered the amount upon his list.

"You know about what he had with him?" he asked.

"Very closely. That is correct. Nothing is missing," Avery answered.

The conductor opened the watch. "The crystal is missing."

Avery nodded. "Yes; it always—that is, it was missing yesterday."

Connery looked up at him, as though slightly puzzled by the manner of the reply; then, having finished his list, he rejoined the surgeon.

Sinclair was still bending over the naked torso. It had been a strong, healthy body; Sinclair guessed its age at fifty. As a boy, the man might have been an athlete—a college track-runner or oarsman—and he had kept himself in condition through middle age. There was no mark or bruise upon the body, except that on the right side and just below the ribs there now showed a scar about an inch and a half long and of peculiar crescent shape. It was evidently a surgical scar and had completely healed.

Sinclair scrutinized this carefully and then looked up to Avery. "He was operated on recently?"

"About two years ago."

"For what?"

"It was some operation on the gall-bladder."

"Performed by Kuno Garrt?"

Avery hesitated. "I believe so."

He watched Sinclair more closely as he continued his examination. Connery touched the surgeon on the arm. "What must be done, Doctor? And where and when do you want to do it?"

Sinclair, however, it appeared, had not yet finished his examination. "Will you pull down the window curtains?" he directed.

As Connery, reaching across the body, complied, the surgeon took a

"He Was Operated On Recently?"

matchbox from his pocket, and glancing about at the three others as though to select from them the one one most likely to be an efficient aid, he handed it to Eaton. "Will you help me, please? Strike a light and hold it as I direct—then draw it away slowly."

He lifted the partly closed eyelid from one of the eyes of the unconscious man and nodded to Eaton: "Hold the light in front of the pupil."

Eaton obeyed, drawing the light slowly away as Sinclair had directed, and the surgeon dropped the eyelid and exposed the other pupil.

"What's that for?" Avery now asked.

"I was trying to determine the seriousness of the injury to the brain. I was looking to see whether light could cause the pupil to contract. There was no reaction."

Avery started to speak, checked himself—and then he said: "There could be no reaction, I believe, Doctor Sinclair."

"What do you mean?"

"His optic nerve is destroyed."

"Ah! He was blind?"

"Yes, he was blind," Avery admitted.

"Blind!" Sinclair ejaculated. "Blind, and operated upon within two years by Kuno Garrt!" Kuno Gartt operated only upon the all-rich and powerful or upon the completely powerless and poor; the unconscious man in the berth could belong only to the first class of Gartt's clientele. The surgeon's gaze again searched the features in the berth; then it shifted to the men gathered about him in the aisle.

"Who did you say this was?" he demanded of Avery.

"I said his name was Nathan Dorne." Avery evaded.

"No, no!" Sinclair jerked out impatiently. "Isn't this—" He hesitated, and finished in a voice suddenly lowered: "Isn't this Basil Santoine?"

Avery, if he still wished to do so, found it impossible to deny.

"Basil Santoine!" Connery breathed.

To the conductor alone, among the four men standing by the berth, the name seemed to have come with the sharp shock of a surprise; with it had come an added sense of responsibility and horror over what had happened to the passenger who had been confided to his care, which made him whiten as he once more repeated the name to himself and stared down at the man in the berth.

Conductor Connery knew Basil Santoine only in the way that Santoine was known to great numbers of other people—that is, by name but not by sight.

Basil Santoine at twenty-two had been graduated from Harvard, though blind. His connections—the family was of well-to-do southern stock—his possession of enough money for his own support, made it possible for him to live idly if he wished; but Santoine had not chosen to make his blindness an excuse for doing this. He had at once settled himself to his chosen profession, which was law. He had not found it easy to get a start in this, and he had succeeded only after great effort in getting a place with a small and unimportant firm. Within a short time, well within two years, men had begun to recognize that in this struggling law firm there was a powerful, clear, compelling mind. Santoine, a youth living in darkness, unable to see the men with whom he talked or the documents and books which must be read to him, was beginning to put the stamp of his personality on the firm's affairs. A year later his name appeared with others of the firm; at twenty-eight his was the leading name. He had begun to specialize long before that time, in corporation law; he married shortly after this. At thirty the firm name represented to those who knew its particulars only one personality, the personality of Santoine; and at thirty-five—though his indifference to money was proverbial—he was many times a millionaire. But except among the small and powerful group of men who had learned to consult him, Santoine himself at that time was utterly unknown.

Consulted continually by men concerned in great projects, immersed day and night in vast affairs, capable of living completely as he wished—he had been, at the age of forty-six, great but not famous, powerful but not publicly known. At that time an event had occurred which had forced the blind man out unwillingly from his obscurity.

This event had been the murder of the great western financier, Matthew Latron. There had been nothing in this affair which had in any way shadowed dishonor upon Santoine. So much as in his role of a mind without personality Santoine ever fought, he had fought against Latron; but his fight had been not against the man but against methods. There had come then a time of uncertainty and unrest; public consciousness was in the process of awakening to the knowledge that strange things, approaching close to the likeness of what men call crime, had been being done under the unassuming name of business. Scandal—financial scandal—breathed more strongly against Latron than perhaps against any of the other western men. He had been among their biggest; he had his enemies, of whom impersonally Santoine might have been counted one, and he had his friends, both in high places; he was a world figure. Then, all of a sudden, the man had been struck down—killed, because of some private quarrel, men whispered, by an obscure and till then unheard-of man.

The trembling wires and cables, which should have carried to the waiting world the expected news of Latron's conviction, carried instead the news of Latron's death; and disorder followed. The first public concern had been, of course, for the stocks and bonds of the great Latron properties; and Latron's bigness had seemed only further evidenced by the stanchness with which the Latron banks, the Latron railroads and mines and public utilities stood firm even against the shock of their builder's death. Assured of this, public interest had shifted to the trial, conviction and sentence of Latron's murderer; and it was during this trial that Santoine's name had become more publicly known. Not that the blind man was suspected of any knowledge—much less of any complicity—in the crime; the murder had been because of a purely private matter; but in the eager questioning into Latron's circumstances and surroundings previous to the crime, Santoine was summoned into court as a witness.

The blind man, led into the court, sitting sightless in the witness chair, revealing himself by his spoken, and even more by his withheld, replies as one of the unknown guiders of the destiny of the Continent and as counselor to the most powerful—himself till then hardly heard of but plainly one of the nation's "uncrowned rulers"—had caught the public sense. The fate of the murderer, the crime, even Latron himself, lost temporarily their interest in the public curiosity over the personality of Santoine.

It had been reported for some days that Santoine had come to Seattle directly after Warden's death; but when this was admitted, his associates had always been careful to add that Santoine, having been a close personal friend of Gabriel Warden, had come purely in a personal capacity, and the impression was given that Santoine had returned quietly some

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